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Wolfgang Vogel Works in Secret on a New Exchange No. 1 Spy Trader Is Trusted in Both East, West

By WILLIAM TUOHY, Times Staff Writer

EAST BERLIN—A polished brass plate on the door of the lime-green stucco building at No. 4 Rellerstrasse reads, "Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Vogel, Lawyer and Notary," which is hardly revealing of the activity that has made Vogel internationally famous.

Nor was Vogel available at what serves as his home and office. A secretary there told a recent visitor that Vogel was not in Berlin but "might be able to say something later."

Vogel is the No. 1 broker of spy exchanges between East and West. And he has indeed been absent, reportedly engaged in working out the final arrangements for an exchange set for Tuesday of an estimated 10 agents held in the West and the East Bloc, among them Soviet Jewish dissident Anatoly Shcharansky.

The West German newspaper Bild, which first disclosed the planned spy swap, said Sunday in advance of publication today that Shcharansky's mother, Ida Milgrom, 77, may be allowed to leave the Soviet Union at a later date.

"The timing has not been fixed and she will not in any circumstances be part of a trade with other people," Bild said, quoting unnamed Soviet sources.

Accused Czech Spy

Meanwhile, Vogel has been interviewing those to be traded, including accused Czechoslovak spy Karl F. Koecher, an alleged "mole" who worked for the CIA as a translator. Koecher and his wife, Hana, who is being detained as a material witness, are said to be the only individuals in U.S. custody involved in the swap.

But while Vogel has been engaged in his delicate chore behind a wall of secrecy, the Soviet Union has apparently been eager to publicize the expected impending exchange for propaganda purposes, according to diplomatic and other sources.

Pointing to the news leaks to Bild and statements by East Germany and Poland acknowledging the exchange, the sources said the disclosures were apparently aimed at

reinforcing the Kremlin's contention that Shcharansky was a spy for the CIA. Shcharansky was sentenced in 1978 to 13 years in prison and labor camp for spying for the United States, a charge that both he and Washington have denied.

Propaganda Ploy

"If Shcharansky was freed without notice, the (Western) media would have reported it as if Moscow was releasing a persecuted human rights campaigner," one diplomat told reporters. "This way his name has been linked to espionage for over a week. This is the impression that will stick in the public mind. He will be the guy who came out in a spy swap."

Publicizing spy trades is not part of Vogel's job. But despite the secrecy surrounding his activities, the burly and bespectacled 61-year-old lawyer who enjoys good living is a curious figure on the international scene. He is condemned by some as a trafficker in human lives but praised by others as a humanitarian who has reduced the level of individual suffering brought on by East-West tensions.

He holds a unique position in East German society. He is trusted by the Politburo; he is a friend of East German leader Erich Honecker and is allowed to travel freely to the West. He is trusted by West Germans and others with whom he deals in the West.

As a holder of East Germany's Order of Merit, first class, he would seem to be a member of the Communist Party, although he has denied this. Asked directly last year whether he is a Communist, Vogel replied:

"That depends on how you want to define communism. Marxism does not exclude faith and humanitarian be-

havior. I try to be both Marxist and humanist, which is never easy."

Vogel first attracted international attention as the man who in 1962, together with the American lawyer James B. Donovan, arranged the exchange of American U-2 pilot Francis Gary Powers for Col. Rudolf Abel, the Soviet superspy arrested in New York.

Since then, Vogel has been the leading East Bloc go-between with the West in matters concerning the treatment of those arrested for espionage.

Vogel was born in the region of Germany known as Lower Silesia, which is now part of Poland. In World War II, he was trained as an aviator but wound up in the infantry. After the war he studied law at the universities of Jena and Leipzig, then joined the East German civil service as a lawyer in the Justice Ministry.

Qualified in East, West

After a dozen years of government service, he went into private practice, becoming known as a bright young lawyer qualified to practice in West Berlin as well as East Berlin.

When the Berlin Wall went up, in 1961, the division of the city separated many families and caused much misery. Vogel found himself acting as attorney and negotiator for people caught in the East who wanted to go to the West. Many had the money to pay people who could arrange this, or had friends or relatives in the West who could do so.

This activity has come to be known as *menschenhandel*, or "trade in people," and Vogel is thought to have been involved in thousands of such transactions. The East Germans see an opportunity to get rid of many dissidents and to acquire hard currency from the West in the bargain.

In order to look as though they are not literally selling human beings, the East Germans calculate a selling, or ransom, price based on

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the sum that the state has supposedly invested in a person's training and education, and how much time the person has before retirement.

Some have described Vogel as "the perfect go-between," but many conservative critics in West Germany say he is in league with the East German police, who keep the jails full in the expectation of getting money for letting prisoners go.



Associated Press

Wolfgang Vogel

Vogel, however, once said in a letter to a newspaper in Frankfurt, West Germany, "My conduct is always correct and humanitarian."

Years ago, one of Vogel's clients, an attractive West German woman, contacted him with a view toward getting her fiance out of an East German jail, where he was being held for an alleged border offense. Vogel was doubly successful. He not only got the man out; he married the

man's fiancée.

In addition to the Powers-Abel exchange, Vogel was involved in exchanging the British agent Greville Wynne for Gordon Lonsdale, a Soviet agent in England, and in many other exchanges.

Also, he has become a legal adviser to the Austrian and British embassies in East Berlin. Bild has reported that the Soviets and British are negotiating a separate exchange of those held for espionage.

Vogel is said to be particularly proud of a three-way deal he worked out in Washington that involved the release of an Israeli detained in Mozambique, an American student held in East Berlin and

a U.S. Air Force clerk who had been spying for the Soviet Union.

Vogel's most recent accomplishment was the exchange of 23 men sentenced as American spies in the East Bloc for four people charged with espionage in the United States.

The transfer took place last June 11 at the Glienicke Bridge, which crosses a small lake from Potsdam in East Germany to the American sector in the southwest corner of West Berlin. The bridge, a sturdy, green steel structure about 100 yards in length, is normally used for four-power military and diplomatic traffic.

On the appointed day, Vogel appeared at the Potsdam end of the bridge. At the other end was Richard R. Burt, who at the time was assistant secretary of state for European affairs. Burt is now the U.S. ambassador to West Germany.

Enjoyed Attention

After the exchange, Vogel invited Burt to lunch at the Palast, the newest and fanciest hotel in East Berlin. For once, he seemed to enjoy all the public attention.

Vogel lives comfortably and quietly in the Friedrich Felde neighborhood of East Berlin. He has a Western car and a vacation house on a lake not far from his home. Of his complex and sensitive job, he said not long ago:

"What's so interesting? I'm just a lawyer who handles some unusual cases."

But reporters and television crews have mounted a 24-hour watch at the Glienicke Bridge, waiting for some signal that another "unusual" case is about to be concluded. Bild, again quoting Soviet sources, said Sunday that Shcharansky will not be among those crossing the bridge, but "would be handed over at a place which has not so far been used for an exchange." There was no confirmation of Bild report.

But no matter where the exchange takes place, Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Vogel will be sure to have a hand in it.